

We claim:

1 1. A method for providing a relational view of electronic objects, comprising steps of:  
2 obtaining organizing rules for organizing electronic objects;  
3 applying the obtained organizing rules against one or more electronic objects, yielding  
4 organized electronic objects; and  
5 rendering the organized electronic objects.

1 2. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the rendering comprises a hierarchical view.

3. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the rendering comprises a nodal view.

4. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the rendering comprises a network view.

5. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the rendering comprises a visual view.

1 6. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the electronic objects comprise at least one of  
2 e-mail messages, textual documents, and image files.

1 7. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the organizing rules specify node-specific  
2 organizing criteria for a multi-level index.

1 8. The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of repeating operation of

2 the applying step and the rendering step upon occurrence of a new electronic object.

1 9. The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of repeating operation of  
2 the applying step and the rendering step upon modification of the organizing rules.

1 10. The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of repeating operation of  
2 the applying step and the rendering step upon request of a user.

1 11. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the organizing rules specify one or more of  
2 text characters, text words, and text phrases as organizing criteria.

1 12. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the organizing rules specify image files as  
2 organizing criteria.

1 13. The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of defining the organizing  
2 rules, further comprising steps of:

3 retrieving a selection of categories;

4 enabling a user to select one or more of the retrieved categories; and

5 for each selected category, enabling the user to build at least one rule.

1 14. The method according to Claim 13, wherein the step of enabling the user to build at least  
2 one rule further comprises the steps of:

retrieving a selection of organizing criteria;  
enabling the user to select one or more of the retrieved organizing criteria; and  
formatting a particular rule from the selected retrieved organizing criteria.

15. A system for providing a relational view of electronic objects, comprising:  
means for obtaining organizing rules for organizing electronic objects, wherein the  
organizing rules specify node-specific organizing criteria for a multi-level index;  
means for applying the obtained organizing rules against one or more electronic objects,  
yielding organized electronic objects; and  
means for rendering the organized electronic objects.

16. A computer program product for providing a relational view of electronic objects, the  
computer program product embodied on one or more computer-readable media and comprising:  
computer-readable program code means for obtaining organizing rules for organizing  
electronic objects, wherein the organizing rules specify node-specific organizing criteria for a  
multi-level index;  
computer-readable program code means for applying the obtained organizing rules against  
one or more electronic objects, yielding organized electronic objects; and  
computer-readable program code means for rendering the organized electronic objects.